



**Office of the United States Attorney  
District of Arizona**

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**PRESS RELEASE**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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**LEADERS OF SIERRA VISTA DRUG TRANSPORTATION  
RING SENTENCED TO 12 ½ YEARS IN PRISON**

TUCSON, Ariz. –The U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona announced the sentencing here of two defendants on drug charges. On June 6, 2005, Ruben Dario Arce, 30, and on June 13, 2005, Eric Anthony Parra, 25, both of Sierra Vista, Ariz., were each sentenced to 150 months in federal prison by U.S. District Judge Raner C. Collins, in Tucson, Ariz.

Arce and Parra were leaders of a Sierra Vista, Ariz. based marijuana transportation organization who had previously pleaded guilty to conspiracy to possess with the intent to distribute nearly 50 tons of marijuana. Federal prosecutors alleged that from the summer of 1999 to July 2001, Arce and Parra organized a drug transportation ring that used rental cars, U-Haul trucks, Penske trucks, Ryder trucks, Bed Mart delivery trucks, Sam Levitz trucks and dump trucks to transport the marijuana throughout Arizona from the Hereford/Sierra Vista area, to Tucson, Casa Grande and Phoenix.

The investigation revealed that conspirators went to different rental depots in and around the Sierra Vista area to rent U-Haul, Penske and Ryder trucks, in order to avoid suspicion by the legitimate business owners. The drivers of the rental trucks, although not military members, wore military fatigues to avoid suspicion when traveling through the Border Patrol checkpoint on Highway 92, near Benson, Ariz., on their way to Tucson, Casa Grande and Phoenix. On each trip they were able to transport over a ton of marijuana.

The investigation also revealed that Bed Mart and Sam Levitz companies had no knowledge of, or involvement in, the illegitimate activities of their drivers. The convicted drivers made legitimate furniture deliveries in the Sierra Vista area, and then picked up over a ton of marijuana on each trip and transported it back to Tucson in the empty delivery truck; dropping the marijuana off at a stash location before returning the empty truck to their employers.

To date, 26 people involved in the drug transportation ring have pleaded guilty to either conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute marijuana or possession with intent to distribute marijuana and have been sentenced to terms ranging from 150 months in prison to a term of probation. In addition to Arce and Parra, those sentenced include Francisco Javier Ramirez-Cuevas, 49, of Hereford, Ariz.,

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135 months in prison; Francisco Javier Ramirez-Ponce, 25, of Hereford, Ariz., 70 months in prison; Hector Alonso Romero-Carrillo, 32, of Sierra Vista, Ariz., 64 months in prison; Dexter Joe Johnson, 34, of Sierra Vista, Ariz., 60 months in prison; Neith Scott Crowder, 32, of Tucson, Ariz., 56 months in prison; Charles Steven Cunningham, 29, of Sierra Vista, Ariz., 35 months in prison; Mitchell Lundell Epherson, 30, of Tucson, Ariz., 18 months in prison; Chrissy Christina Robbins, 28, of Modesto, Calif., 15 months in prison; Robert Cortez Sparkman, 32, of Tucson, Ariz., 32 months in prison; William Terry Biggers, 38, of Tucson, Ariz., 60 months probation; William Laroy Davis, 34, of Sierra Vista, Ariz., 40 months in prison; Robert Glenn Vande Sandt, 41, of Sierra Vista, Ariz., 60 months probation; Stanford A. Lewis, 50, of Sierra Vista, Ariz., 40 months in prison; David Allan Roberts, Jr., 36, of Sierra Vista, Ariz., 8 months in prison and 8 months home confinement; Shandra Lynn Ward, 34, of Sierra Vista, Ariz., 60 months probation; Nalonie Ann Brown, 35, of Sierra Vista, Ariz., 60 months probation; Deborah Ageton, 50, of Sierra Vista, Ariz., 60 months probation; Jessica Ann Burnett, 26, of Sierra Vista, Ariz., 60 months in prison; Nicole Dawn Sechrist, 27, of Sierra Vista, Ariz., 60 months probation; Robert Allen Phillips, 38, of Sierra Vista, Ariz., 60 months probation; Matthew Joseph Lasota, 27, of Sierra Vista, Ariz., 1 day in prison and 48 months supervised release; Michael Anthony Gleave, Jr., 25, of Sierra Vista, Ariz., 68 months in prison; Christopher Steven Nelson, 30, of Sierra Vista, Ariz., 60 months probation; and Todd Leo Thomas, 40, of Hereford, Ariz., 10 months in prison.

Gregory Lee Lainhart, 44, and Jonathan Matthew Cunningham, 39, both of Sierra Vista, Ariz., have pleaded guilty to conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute marijuana in connection with this conspiracy and are pending sentencing. Gabriel Alvarez-Ruiz, 34, formerly of Hereford, Ariz., has fled to Agua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico, and is the only remaining defendant pending in this case. There is a warrant for Alvarez-Ruiz's arrest and anyone with information as to his whereabouts should contact the U.S. Marshal's Service in Tucson, Arizo. or 520-88-CRIME.

The investigation was conducted by the Organized Crime and Drug Enforcement Task Force, composed of agents from the FBI, DEA, Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Ariz. Department of Public Safety, with assistance from the Border Alliance Group (BAG), the Southern Ariz. Border Initiative (SABI), the Metropolitan Area Narcotics Trafficking Interdiction Squad (MANTIS), U.S. Customs and Border Protection - Border Patrol, Cochise County Sheriff's Office, Pima County Sheriff's Office, Sierra Vista Police Department and the Tucson Police Department.

The prosecution was handled by Mary Sue Feldmeier, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Ariz., Tucson, Ariz.

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